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Rising Tensions in East Asia: A Transatlantic Perspective

In 2011, U.S. foreign policy focus shifted from the Middle East to the rising powers in the Asia-Pacific. This shift is also referred to as the 'pivot towards Asia' and U.S. allies in Europe had a similar rebalance in pursuing their interests in the region. Germany especially has taken a leading role in this shift as China's largest European trading partner. This has become a key issue for transatlantic relations and on October 24, 2014 the American Institute for Contemporary German Studies (AICGS) held a joint-event with the Johns Hopkins School for Advanced International Studies (SAIS) to discuss the change in the transatlantic landscape resulting of the U.S.' and EU's parallel shift towards Asia. The full-day conference covered many topics, including regional economic challenges and opportunities, and reconciliation efforts in East Asia and was well visited by prominent policy professionals and academics alike.

Regional Economic Challenges and Opportunities

The consensus among the speakers *Bill Brooks*, Adjunct Professor at the Reischauer Center for East Asian Studies at SAIS, *Thomas Hueck*, Chief Economist at Bosch GmbH, and *JoAnn Fan*, Visiting Fellow at Brookings Institution, was that "the economic relationship with Asian countries is more important than a military presence."

The U.S. and Germany are powerful and influential players in the Asian region and have interdependences with Asian countries. The U.S. strategy is based especially on bilateral security trade systems that bind Asia to the U.S. Regarding their economic cooperation, Germany and the U.S. use Asian markets completely differently. The U.S.' trade with Asia is based primarily on low cost products for the global market,

whereas Germany and the EU's production in Asia mainly consist of products for the local market in Asia. The U.S. and the EU's trade with Asia will continue to increase in the future and create an even stronger interdependence of the markets. The panel agreed that the relationship to Asia will always be economic based and that cooperation on a political level is rather unlikely.

Concerning TPP, the panel whether a U.S. led TPP would become a game changer in Asia. *Brooks* especially underlined the importance of a Japanese and Chinese membership in TPP, in particular the possibility of Japan collaborating with China in the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) as opposed to concentrating more on the West with TPP. Additionally, he stated that "without China, TPP is extremely weak, so why exclude them?" In sum, TPP with China as its member is a powerful and promising alliance.

Lastly, *Hueck* addressed the political system in China. A key requirement for TPP is to associate only with countries who share certain systems e.g. free markets and common values. However, China could nonetheless provide some benefits for TPP as a member. Overall, China's influence must be conceived as indispensable. Current international institutions are still dominated by the West, but in the near future China might take over and shape international institutions and organizations.

The Burden of the Past in East Asian Relations

The second panel hosted *Mark E. Manyin*, Specialist in Asian Affairs at the Congressional Research Service (CRS), *Seiko Mimaki*, Guest Lecturer at Johns Hopkins University, and *Martina Timmerman*, Vice-President of International Affairs at TIMA International.

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In her opening statements, Dr. Lily Gardner Feldman, moderator of the panel and Resident Director of the Society, Culture and History program at AICGS, questioned the nature of contested history and reconciliation issues and whether Germany might provide some insight on how to untie the "Gordian knot of history" to advance reconciliation in East Asia. She raised concerns that the German experience is unique to Germany alone and cannot provide lessons for Asia. At the same time however there is a deficit of other examples for sustained reconciliation in the international arena. The comparison therefore can engender a debate, even if a replication of the German model is not possible.

In his presentation, *Manyin* delved deep into the issues surrounding Japanese reconciliation in Asia following the Japanese colonial period. With continued debate surrounding the topic of comfort women in South Korea and China, the Yasukuni shrine in Japan and Japanese history textbooks, Japan's Prime Minister *Shinzo Abe's* reconciliation efforts are seen as self-inflicted wounds for Japan. Some might argue that this is a national security strategy for Japan and an effort to revitalize the economy. A clear link has been established between reconciliation and a prosperous economy that is built on a confident Japanese sense of self-esteem. Working through Japan's violent history is fundamental to *Abe's* vision of where he wants to lead Japan, in which a positive view of Japanese history will rebuild positive links between state and society to stop self-criticism and international self-flagellation. This in turn will increase pride in Japanese history and government, and mobilize the people to stimulate and revive the economy and to address domestic and external social problems.

The more fundamental challenge for Japan's impenitence is a return to a Chinese hegemony and a refocus on Sino-centrism. To counter this in a positive way, Japan can draw on the European example of reconciliation that demonstrates successful reconciliation not just with the Jewish population, but also with the world, though many Japanese would reject this comparison.

Lastly, the lesson of the European process demonstrates just how 'messy' reconciliation efforts really are. For successful reconciliation, there needs to be extensive dialogue between the aggressor and the victim, where the victim shares the burden of the responsibility in reconciliation as well as the aggressor. The main difference between German and Japanese reconciliation efforts is that in Japan reconciliation efforts have been top down and instantiated by the government, whereas in Europe reconciliation efforts are instantiated by civil society actors and religious groups.

In her presentation, *Mimaki* described the 'Asian paradox' in which Asia suffers a disconnect between growing economic interdependence on the one hand, and backward political and security cooperation on the other hand. These historic differences are widening and are influencing various policy areas, including East Asian security cooperation. An example would be South Korea's failure to sign a Korea-Japan General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) in May 2012 due to strong public opposition. To address these issues, she suggested using Germany as a role model for reconciliation. A particular example would be the creation of common teaching materials for Japan, China, and Korea. Quoting *Park Geun-hye*, President of South Korea, at the National Diplomatic Academy on November 14, 2013: "As Germany and France, and Germany and Poland did, we can publish a joint history textbook for Northeast Asia and build up practices of cooperation and dialogue."

Mimaki discussed the notion of whether Germany or the U.S. should function as a mediator in reconciliation efforts. On the one hand, the U.S. has more strategic interests, and on the other hand, Germany is more qualified from its long experience of reconciliation and accumulated methods. Furthermore, more actors should be included in on the debate, such as political leaders, historians and experts and citizens. Lastly, she suggested that at the core of this debate should be the common shared values, such as freedom, democracy, equality, rule of law and human rights.

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Martina Timmerman stressed that reconciliation needs to be rationalized as it is currently a highly emotional topic. The first step towards reconciliation would be to “de-emotionalize” it. Those who would benefit the most from peaceful international relations should be in the driver seat towards stronger reconciliation efforts. In most cases this points directly at the business world, as they are the greatest stakeholders in international relations. The reason that politicians should not be at the forefront of reconciliation efforts is because politicians have to face elections and their terms are usually short lived compared to the business world where long-term economic relationships are essential. She suggested that Japanese companies in Japan work together unanimously to take the lead, so that Japan can be in control of their reconciliation, rather than reacting to international reproaches and reprimands. This is the only way Japan will be able to steer reconciliation in a direction that will also address their economic needs.

the past as a political tool, but rather to address issues through reconciliation and not confrontation.

Key Note Speech

In his speech, Former German Ambassador to Japan and China *Volker Stanzel* provided a transatlantic perspective on the challenges and opportunities the West is facing with rising tensions in Asia. Currently, Chinese hegemony is on the rise and China is claiming its rightful place in the world by writing its own rules, much to the dismay of the U.S. and EU. However, the U.S., EU and other Asian countries can significantly benefit from new forms of globalization in East Asia, though this might come with some adverse effects as well. China is becoming the new normative power in Asia and claims that the Pacific is big enough for two world powers. Since China’s democratic neighbors have their own, well developed identities, based on domestic social contracts, they are not willing to give up their identities to align with China; this might cause some friction. However *Stanzel* reminded that dependence on China’s development is mutual: the EU and the U.S. are as depended on China as China is on the West. Finally, *Stanzel’s* recommendation for the future is not to use